

## BASIC BIBLE TRUTHS

### **Suffering - WHY DOES GOD ALLOW IT?**

When you have read this article you will know the answers to these questions:

1. What part does man play in causing suffering?
2. Why does God allow natural disasters?
3. Why do so many people suffer so much?
4. Does suffering have any value?
5. Will suffering ever end?

At the outset, we need to realise that God loves the world with an everlasting love:

‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16).

Salvation has come to mankind through the suffering of Jesus Christ. In him, God is redeeming the world to Himself.

#### 1. WHAT PART DOES MAN PLAY IN CAUSING SUFFERING?

God has given everyone the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. He has promised everlasting life to those who choose to follow His way. Sadly, man often makes the wrong choice. God’s principle of love is ignored.

Down the centuries, millions have died in countless wars. Wars start because of man’s pride and lust for power (James 4:1-3). God is not to blame.

Hunger, too, has brought suffering to millions. Yet men selfishly store food in one country, while people starve in another. Men are responsible for these actions, not God.

Illegal ‘hard’ drugs are sweeping the world, with terrible consequences for millions. Money rules. The Bible says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Greedy men are at fault.

As in the days of Noah, we live in a violent age. Old ladies are attacked, young children are abused, prisoners are tortured. We must acknowledge that man plays a big part in causing suffering.

#### 2. WHY DOES GOD ALLOW DISASTERS?

The power in nature is awesome. We cannot experience an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a raging sea or a hurricane without feeling helpless.

Yet many accidents, called acts of God”, could be avoided. For example, why do wealthy people choose to live in earthquake zones?

The unsinkable” ship, the Titanic, struck an iceberg. Hundreds of passengers drowned. It was tragic, but surely we cannot expect God to move icebergs out of the way?

We live in a world of cause and effect. We know that we can drown in water or get burned in a fire. The universe is governed by natural laws. When these laws are challenged, we shall not always escape. If God kept changing His natural laws to protect us from ourselves, how would that encourage responsible behaviour?

However, there are disasters which man cannot foresee, like lack of rainfall. God is the Master of the Universe, not man (Job 38:1-4). We shall not, in this present age, fully understand God’s mind. But, we are all part of a common humanity. Just as God ‘sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45), so also natural disasters affect the innocent and guilty alike. If God’s servants were always specially protected, people would come to Him for the wrong reasons. God’s power is great and we are weak. He does not give us a guarantee of security in this life. That should encourage us to listen to His message of salvation, given in the Bible.

#### 3. WHY DO SO MANY SUFFER SO MUCH?

Why is there so much pain in the world?

Why are children born blind or deformed?

Jesus made clear it was not always as a result of personal sin (John 9:1-3).

It is easy to assume that suffering is always evil. However, a universal principle is at work. The Bible teaches that suffering, in itself, is not evil. It is the outworking of a much deeper problem: suffering is the result of sin (the breaking of God's law).

"Through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5; 12).

The perfect harmony between God and man had been broken. Mankind has been paying a heavy price ever since. Sin and death are the real problems of man. They help, in part, to explain the problem of suffering.

When Adam sinned, death became universal. There are no exceptions to it. There has only been one man who never sinned: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God raised him from the dead.

But why did God allow Jesus to suffer and die? Jesus, the best of men, did not deserve to die. The answer to this question is at the very heart of the problem of suffering.

God allowed Jesus to die, to save you and me. Because man had fallen from God, he had to be re-united with God through the life of a sinless man. The victory of Jesus over sin made everlasting life possible for all who seek forgiveness for their sins, and who keep God's commandments. The suffering of Jesus in obedience to God was the price of our redemption. Jesus, himself, learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

God also suffered as He watched Jesus die on the cross. If God and Jesus both suffered, and yet were innocent, we should learn two things:

- (a) Mankind should not expect to escape suffering
- (b) Suffering is not just something bad:

It also has to do with victory over sin, and God's gift of everlasting life.

When innocent people died after a tower collapsed, Jesus said, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:4, 5). Dying without God is worse than suffering.

The important thing is not living a long life, free from suffering. It is about following God's way, even if it means suffering, so that we do not perish eternally.

#### 4. DOES SUFFERING HAVE ANY VALUE?

Yes, it certainly does. The suffering of Jesus had value, 'God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died (or us, that ... we should live together with him" (1 Thessalonians 5:9,10) We are more likely to grow spiritually when life is hard than when it is easy.

Our faith in God and acceptance of suffering can lead us to everlasting life and eternal fellowship with Him. That is the ultimate reality of life. So, God chastens us 'for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it' (Hebrews 12:10,11).

Like Job, we must forsake pride, and understand that God is our only refuge (Job 42:1-6).

Rather than blame God for the suffering in a world which is not yet perfect, we should thank God that He has given us a way of escape.

#### 5. WILL SUFFERING EVER END?

Yes, suffering will end. God is the architect of the Universe. He has a master plan for mankind. God plans to cleanse the earth of sickness and sorrow, sin and suffering, disease and death. He will send Jesus back to the earth to "make all things new" (Revelation 21:3-5). God plans to fill the earth with His glory.

The Apostle Paul said that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). An understanding of suffering can help you towards God's Kingdom, if you give your life now to God.

Truly, "if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

